



INTRODUCTION

Introducing the Lives of Girls in a European Context and Beyond

Agency, Social Vulnerability and Welfare Measures

Linda Arnell and Maria A. Vogel

During the last few decades, large-scale social changes have taken place across Europe. These include neoliberal developments within social policy, changes in the shape of economic crises, globalization and the growth of the European Union (EU). At the same time, the United Kingdom (UK) has left the EU and borders have been closing as a consequence of the ongoing refugee crisis resulting from the war in Syria, and lately also due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These changes have affected the societal conditions shaping girls' and young women's opportunities and the ways in which they can mould their lives. In particular, there are vast discrepancies between neoliberal understandings of girls' and young women's own responsibilities and the material and structural limitations that many of them face. The current geopolitical changes and migration patterns also affect girls' lives, as well as how girls and girlhood are conceptualized and subjected to political decision-making. It is therefore crucial to investigate and analyse the lives and social situations of girls and young women today. Consequently, the aim of this anthology is to illustrate a range of interactions between constructions of social problems and social systems on the

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one hand, and girls, girlhood and young femininity on the other. While emphasizing the localized experiences of girls and young women within a European context, we also link these individual and local experiences to global structures of power.

Girls, Girlhood and Transnationalism

The category of 'girl' is generally related to a child of a specific gender and age, often defining adolescent females. However, important scholarly work has been put into problematizing the boundaries of the concept, unfolding its social and/or cultural construction and emphasizing the intersections of not only gender and age but also ability, ethnicity, sexuality and class (Jiwani et al. 2006; Lindquist, Wuttunee and Flicker 2016; Erevelles and Nguyen 2016; de Finney, Krueger-Henney and Palacios 2019; Brickman 2019). The scholars contributing to this anthology use the concept of girls in different ways; however, a shared basis is the understanding of girlhood as a lived experience, where the lives of children and young people categorized as girls in various ways are affected by that very categorization.

The anthology is devoted to girls' and young women's lives and social situations in an extended European context, making it an important contribution towards expanding the knowledge of social problems, welfare measures, and girls' lives and transitions to adulthood in the field of girlhood studies. The broad context of Europe and beyond enables contributors to present findings about social situations and how social problems are formulated and managed in different cultural contexts and political and social systems. Since there is a variety of social and welfare systems in Europe, it also provides an opportunity to investigate how young femininity, girls' and young women's social situations and social problems are formulated, managed and understood in relation to different social conditions, which is rarely seen internationally. This also gives us a unique opportunity to map out similarities and differences between various European countries regarding welfare measures and social systems in connection to girls' and young women's lives.

As mentioned above, the broadened European context is diverse and the political, social and welfare systems vary, as do girls' lives and opportunities. Hence, it is impossible to paint a full picture of the complexity of girls' lives and social situations within this context. Rather, the ambition of the anthology has been to focus on girls and girlhood from a social sci-

ences perspective, striving to stimulate critical conversations about girls' social situations and lives within different cultural contexts and political and social systems. We have done so, with reference to Catherine Vanner (2019: 128), 'by analysis of the structural constraints imposed upon them by global hegemonic structures including capitalism, neocolonialism, and patriarchy'. This needs to be understood in relation to the European context and its history of colonialism and patriarchal structure, and its many different cultural, political and social systems, but also in relation to girlhood studies as formed in an Anglo-Saxon context.

Girlhood studies is a rather new research field, stemming from a critique of the marginalization of girls within both youth research and women's studies in the late 1970s. Since then, girl-centred research has increased dramatically and has become a focus for studies within various disciplines and in many parts of the world. However, girlhood studies is still developing, frequently using intersectional analysis and critical perspectives to highlight and question gender-specific research, which in Mary Kearney's (2009: 19) words tends to 'naturalize all female youth as white, Western, middle-class, heterosexual, and able-bodied'. This development, Kearney argues, has meant that researchers focus more on girls' intersectional identities and global diversity, as a result of critical race, postcolonial and queer theory and disability studies. Nonetheless, more attention is still paid to gender than to intersectional identities – which are related to structural aspects of class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability and age – within the field of girlhood studies (Kearney 2009).

In relation to the interest in intersectional identities, studying transnational girlhood can be understood as recognizing girls' lives from their own perspectives and highlighting their situations within global structures of power (Switzer et al. 2016). Vanner (2019: 126) also highlights the importance of recognizing 'girls who have traditionally not been given equal opportunities to speak on an international stage'. However, as Yasmin Jiwani, Candis Steenbergen and Claudia Mitchell (2006) elucidate, emphasizing girls' agency while at the same time recognizing the structural and social systems that constrain it is a difficult task.

Following Vanner's (2019) features of transnational girlhood when working with this anthology, we have tried in various ways to include an intersectional perspective, prioritizing girls' localized lived experiences, which are not always considered within the Anglo-Saxon context, and to recognize girls' agency and the ways in which structural constraints operate, including global structures such as capitalism, neocolonialism

and patriarchy. Using Ann Smith's reasoning, transnationalism can refer not only to processes that are related to multiple national territories, such as political, economic and social activities, but also to activities or processes that are 'weakening borders other than those between nation-states' (2019: 9). Adhering to Smith's (2019) definition thus provides us with the opportunity to see girls' renegotiations of boundaries, whether they are physical, bodily or performative, or have to do with cultural values or social norms, as transnational acts, weakening different structures of power. In various ways, the chapters in this anthology thus demonstrate how the power of national borders, and the various political, social and welfare systems operating within them, regulate the opportunities and constraints in girls' lives, at the same time as they show how girls renegotiate, or even weaken, boundaries.

The Structure and Organization of the Book

This anthology takes its point of departure in current political and social developments in Europe and beyond and investigates the construction of social problems and girls' agency, vulnerabilities, and performances of femininity. It also highlights the situation of girls who have experienced interventions by social services, such as secure care and study counselling programmes, as well as how social problems are formulated and managed within a European context. The anthology consists of three sections covering three comprehensive themes: Agency and Embodiment, Transitions to Adulthood, and Support and Control.

Part I: Agency and Embodiment

The chapters in the first part focus on girls' own experiences of 'living like a girl' in today's Europe. The interest lies in girls' lives and their negotiations of agency, vulnerability and social problems, as well as their performance of femininity. The different chapters highlight girls' local experiences in relation to global structures of power and discuss discrepancies between neoliberal understandings of girls' own responsibilities and the material limitations of anti-feminism and racism within Europe today.

In the first chapter, 'Girlhood and Agency in a Turbulent Society: Russian Girls Caught in the Maze of a Conservative Turn', Olga Zdravo-

myslova and Elena Onegina discuss girls' understandings of their lives and futures in a Russian context, focusing on the expanding role of the Orthodox Church and conservative politics, and illustrating the growing visibility of alternative girlhoods. They argue that various norms and behaviours, in comparison to those available to previous generations, have increased girls' freedom, but at the same time have introduced new risks and conflicts, creating gaps between generations.

Chapter 2, 'Just Ordinary: Self-Surveillance in Relation to Gender and (Dis)ability Norms' by Kamilla Peuravaara, addresses the experiences of mirroring among Swedish girls with an intellectual impairment, in relation to gender and (dis)ability social norms. Peuravaara shows how this mirroring involves a continuous doing, and how this doing and the idea of an 'ordinary girl' are related to disciplinary practices and norms affecting young femininity as well as conceptions of (dis)ability and aspects of ableism. Furthermore, she reveals that being 'just ordinary' is a position to which not all girls have access.

In Chapter 3, 'Youth Consumption, Agency and Economic Crisis: Rethinking Young Italian Females' Lifestyles', Geraldina Roberti assesses whether the economic crisis in Italy has modified girls' agency, habits and lifestyles, with reference to values, consumption models and economic and family structures. She shows that consumer culture risks (re)producing socially expected feminine behaviours through the gender-role socialization of girls and young women. Understanding girls as powerful actors in a global market, Roberti argues, also risks diminishing the profound social and economic inequalities that continue to exist within contemporary consumer society.

The fourth chapter, "'Good Girl": Israeli Ethiopian Girls Negotiate their Blackness' by Sigal Oppenheim-Shachar, investigates how adolescent Ethiopian girls living in the predominantly white society of Israel face the challenge of positively experiencing their skin colour amid experiences of alienation, shaming and low self-esteem in a neoliberal climate. Oppenheim-Shachar discusses the mechanisms for coping with the stigma surrounding Ethiopian girls' noticeable blackness, gender and socioeconomic status and shows how these girls both internalize and resist the hegemonic discourses in order to practise varying forms of agentic femininity.

In the final chapter of this section, 'Fighting Like a Boy? Victimization and Agency in the Lives of Young Women who Offend', Susan A. Batchelor discusses girls' violent offending within a Scottish context and examines the gendered power dynamics within the families and street-

orientated peer groups of young women convicted of violent offences. She demonstrates how these girls position themselves as active and empowered agents, drawing upon neoliberal, post-feminist discourses, and how, within the context of the juvenile justice system, these discourses reframe structural disadvantages as individual problems related to risky behaviours or choices.

Part II: Transitions to Adulthood

The second part of the book focuses on girls' academic routes and transitions into adulthood. The four chapters within this section focus on how different national, structural and economic contexts and circumstances regulate girls' transitions. More specifically, the chapters discuss prerequisites for girls' transitions from school to work and from girlhood to adulthood, with a focus on marginalization, the labour market, expectations of motherhood and family, economics and social class.

The first chapter in this part, Chapter 6, 'Poor Educational Attainment, Training Opportunities, and Transitions to Adulthood: The Case of Young Spanish Women' by Elena Quintana-Murci, María Tugores-Ques, and Francesca Salvà-Mut, highlights school-to-work transitions with a focus on the educational, labour and personal pathways of girls who attended basic vocational education and training (VET) courses in Spain. They show that these girls' educational pathways are characterized by the repetition of courses and expulsions from primary and secondary schooling and that there is a strong and persistent gender segregation within the basic VET.

In Chapter 7, 'Transitions of Young Women from Education to Employment in Croatia: Social Reproduction at Work', Dunja Potocnik discusses girls' educational routes and their opportunities in the labour market in Croatia. The chapter takes a close look at how social background, geographical context, intergenerational (im)mobility and social reproduction affect girls' realization of their aspirations. Potocnik highlights how, to a significant extent, girls' social background, gender and a restraining social context, especially in rural settings, prevent young women from expressing their educational and career aspirations and accomplishing their life goals.

In the following chapter, 'Study Counselling Experiences and Educational Choice-Making of Girls with Migrant Backgrounds in the Context

of Finnish General Upper Secondary Education', Linda Maria Laaksonen, Anna-Maija Niemi and Markku Jahnukainen explore girls' experiences of study counselling and the obstacles and prospects experienced by academically oriented girls with immigrant backgrounds in Finland during their studies. They show how language proficiency, lack of knowledge about the education system, and preconceptions about gender and their migrant background shape girls' educational choice-making and the options they are given.

In Chapter 9, '“We Can't Keep Her Here, She's Too Bad”: Understanding How Girls' School Experiences Influence Post-School Trajectories', Hannah Walters explores the myriad of structural barriers at work throughout girls' educational and personal journeys towards enrolling in beauty courses. This includes how compulsory education is understood by participants as a hostile space related to axes of class and gender. She argues that vocational learning environments, originally developed as a means of supporting students, have instead become caught up in a market model of education. This model risks not supporting students to make their own choices but instead contributing to social vulnerabilities and the enduring class and gender segregation in contemporary Britain.

Part III: Support and Control

The three chapters constituting the third and final part of the book deal with society's ways of controlling and supporting girls within the welfare systems of Denmark, Sweden and Scotland. The chapters discuss the different measures with which girls come into contact, measures aiming both to control and support. The chapters reflect upon how social vulnerability and social problems are formulated and managed in different cultural contexts, as well as various political and social systems, including the juvenile justice system, social services and sports interventions.

In Chapter 10, 'Becoming a “Football Girl”: On Disidentification and the Appropriation of Gender Norms and Hierarchies in Sports-Based Interventions in the Swedish Urban Periphery', David Ekholm, Magnus Dahlstedt, and Julia Rönnbäck discuss sports-based interventions as an integral feature of social policy and one of the strategies to respond to the social problems following on from exclusion and urban segregation. They discuss, and question, sport as a means of inclusion, and how gendered and ethno-cultural characteristics are intertwined, constructing all girls

who live in marginalized neighbourhoods as subject to patriarchal rule, rooted in specific ethno-cultural communities. This obscures the wider socio-economic setting of the surrounding society.

Chapter 11, “‘Really, I Can Take Care of Myself’”: Protection and Care in Danish Secure Institutions’ by Ann-Karina Henriksen, focuses on girls who are placed in secure institutions on welfare grounds. She analyses the effects of secure institutions as a punitive response to social disadvantage as well as a means to protect girls. She discusses girls’ experiences of marginalization, gendered control and regulation and how the effects of confinement are uniquely gendered, with the consequence of inadequate treatment, particularly in relation to trauma and mental illness.

In the final chapter, ‘Girlhood Incarcerated: Perspectives from Secure Care’, Annie Crowley, Anna Schliehe and Maria A. Vogel give us an insight into secure care across Scotland and Sweden, and young women’s experiences of confinement in particular. They ask questions about welfare measures, girls’ agency and social vulnerability and delve into the concepts of gender and age in relation to constraining institutional environments, with their joint punitive and protective functions. They show that, in both Sweden and Scotland, the welfare and protection of young people is a joint aim of secure care, something that inherently affects the young women referred there, in terms of both their present girlhood and future opportunities.

The comprehensive themes covered in the three sections are arranged pedagogically, starting in the lived experience of girls and young women and from there moving on to structural and sociopolitical aspects regulating those lived experiences. However, the chapters are freestanding, enabling the reader to either choose chapters that speak to their special interest or read the book cover to cover in order to get a composed understanding of the lives of girls in contemporary Europe and beyond.

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